

Plant Fact Sheet

SANDBERG BLUEGRASS

Poa secunda J. Presl

Plant Symbol = POSE

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Plant Materials
Program



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Alternate Names

big bluegrass; *Poa ampla*, *Poa canbyi*, *Poa confuse*, *Poa gracillima*, *Poa sandbergii*, *Poa scabrella*, *Poa nevadensis*, *Poa laevigata*, *Poa juncifolia*, *Poa incurve*; some of these synonyms, such as *Poa nevadensis* are sometimes recognized at the species level in some states.

Uses

Livestock: Early spring grazing by cattle or sheep is one of the primary uses of Sandberg bluegrass seedlings. In adapted areas, there is no other grass that provides an equal volume of early spring forage. It makes good spring calving or lambing pasture.

Wildlife: Upland game birds, especially pheasants, choose fields of Sandberg bluegrass for nesting sites because Sandberg bluegrass has more early spring growth than other dryland grasses and the basal leaves provide good shade.

Woodland: Sandberg bluegrass has been successfully used for reseeding burned-over forest lands in pine forests of the West. It has a remarkable ability to produce roots which effectively suppress weed growth.

Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

Description

Sandberg bluegrass is one of the native bluegrasses and is an important component of the sagebrush grassland vegetation in the western United States. It is a medium-sized cool season bunchgrass with numerous fine basal leaves 8 to 16 inches long. These leaves are a smooth, deep blue green and are folded with keel-shaped tips typical of bluegrasses. This long-lived perennial reaches 2 to 4 feet in height. Its inflorescence is a narrow panicle up to 8 inches long. It has a strong fibrous root system but will occasionally develop short rhizomes. The flower spikelets do not have a web of hairs at the base, unlike Kentucky bluegrass, which does.

Sandberg bluegrass begins growth early in spring, before crested wheatgrass, and matures in early summer unless moisture is sufficient to keep it green all summer. In this respect it is the most persistent of all the cool season grasses.

Adaptation and Distribution

This native bluegrass thrives on a variety of soils from moderately coarse sands to fine clays. It will tolerate coarse sands and dense clays, but will not grow under saline conditions and can tolerate weakly acid or alkaline soils. Well-drained mountain loams are a good place to look for Sandberg bluegrass stands.

Although it grows in moist conditions (15 to 20 inch precipitation zone) it will not tolerate early spring flooding, high water tables, or poor drainage. It does

best with cool winter moisture above 7,000 feet. It has excellent cold tolerance but does not do as well as other cool season grasses during drought. Its tolerance to shade and grazing is moderate but its ability to withstand burning is very low except when dormant.

Sandberg bluegrass is distributed throughout the West. For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Web site.

Establishment

Seed of Sandberg bluegrass should be drilled at 1/4 to 3/4 inches deep depending upon soil type: 1/4 inch for fine, moist soils, 1/2 inch for medium textures, and 3/4 inch for coarse or dry soils. On semiarid lands, 3 pounds pure live seed (PLS) per acre is adequate. Harsh or erosive sites require doubling of the seeding rate as does broadcast seeding.

The seed should be planted 2 months prior to the most reliable precipitation: usually early spring, late summer or late fall depending upon the area. When seeding in spring it is advisable to plant as soon as possible since high soil temperatures will put the seedlings into dormancy. Prechilling will improve germination of the seed. Seedling vigor is moderate to good for a bluegrass. It does not respond significantly to irrigation and gives only moderate response to nitrogen applications. It is weakly compatible to seeding with other cool season species. It can be seeded with other grasses, forbs, legumes, or shrubs. Weed control may be needed.

Management

Sandberg bluegrass has good palatability to livestock in spring and fall and to deer in the spring. It has excellent palatability to elk all year. Cattle prefer Sandberg bluegrass in the spring and it should be grazed when it reaches eight inches in height. Livestock graze Sandberg bluegrass in the vegetative

stage, but avoid it when headed. Livestock should be removed while there is still enough moisture in the ground to allow regrowth before plants go dormant. Regrowth can be grazed after the plants turn green in the fall, but a 6-inch stubble should be left.

Overgrazing and severe trampling are injurious to native stands of this grass and without proper protective grazing, a range will deteriorate rapidly. New seedlings are easily pulled up by grazing animals and, therefore, should not be grazed until the stands are more than 2 years old and are sufficiently well-rooted to withstand grazing. Spring and fall

grazing are recommended. When properly managed, Sandberg bluegrass will compete with cheatgrass.

Pests and Potential Problems

The primary pests of Sandberg bluegrass are grasshoppers, jackrabbits, and rodents. Diseases include leaf and stem rusts and stem maggots.

Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)

‘Sherman’ (OR). Seed can be obtained from most commercial seed stores.

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

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